



## Dublin: A Walk on the Wilde Side

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By Emilie Harting

Dublin's most famous residential street, Merrion Square, is formed like a long U, its three sides bordered by tall, attached red brick townhouses with curved fanlights above brightly colored doors and wrought iron railings. At its center, a lush park finishes the composition.

In the morning, I walked the square, and the city awakened. Residents ventured out to snatch the morning paper and duck back inside. Men and women strutted off with briefcases. Dogs scampered down steps, anxiously pulling their owners to the large green. Merrion Square emerged before me, a Georgian stage set made relevant with entrances and exits into vibrant, 21st-century Dublin.



photo courtesy of Visit Dublin

A life-sized sculpture of writer Oscar Wilde, complete with bright waistcoat, florid shirt, and wavy hair, lounged on a rock inside the park. With a wistful, yet slightly irreverent smirk, he looked almost straight in the direction of #1 Merrion Square, where his parents, a poet mother and surgeon father, lived from 1855 to 1878. "That's a very controversial sculpture," said a friendly dog walker, seeming to apologize for her city's taste in art.

Promptly at 10am, I knocked on the door of [The Oscar Wilde House](#). "Are there any of Wilde's belongings in the house?" I asked the guide.

"No, but if you come into his father's study, you'll see a bookcase that is original from the time," he responded. "And the Old Portland Stone floor you're standing on was here. The plaster casts here in the entrance way depict the four seasons, or the ages of life." Had I been standing on the front steps in the late 1800s, Oscar might have come through the door and headed off to classes at Trinity College. Now, the building belongs to the American College.

With each stroll around the square, the presence of great minds became more ubiquitous. Daniel O'Connell, the nineteenth century politician who worked for a united Ireland, was one of them. Today, #58 is owned by the University of Notre Dame, which uses it for classrooms and offices.

Number 29, an eponymous house museum, had a bright maroon awning leading downstairs to servants' quarters in the basement. Stuffed chairs sat empty, mahogany tables held Wedgwood vases, and oval and gilded mirrors graced the walls. The third floor, where the children lived, was filled with toys, and had a separate governess's room with a stenciled floor.



photo courtesy of Number 29 House Museum

Later in the day, the steadfast red brick buildings of the square basked against bright blue skies, and artists hung their work on the wrought iron fence that surrounds the central garden. Once a key-only park for the fancily-dressed and parasoled, the space became a soup kitchen during the famine of the mid-1800s. Now its spreading trees, circular flower gardens, and winding paths are open to everyone, and there are benches to sit on and sculpture to look at.

Another treasure I could have easily missed is #56, Louise Kennedy's, a three-story boutique with select items from Paris and Italy. I spent quite some time perusing the cache of hand woven scarves, elegant silk blouses and pants, handmade jewelry, and blown glass.

The [Merrion Hotel](#), my home base for three days, was built from a row of four townhouses and impeccably restored in Georgian style with richly detailed plaster ceilings, mosaic fireplaces, bright mustard and yellow walls and large paintings. It boasts a top-notch art collections, including a stellar assemblage of contemporary Irish works.

One afternoon I took tea here, and glancing out the window into the garden, I was captivated by a life-sized sculpture of James Joyce by Rowan Gillespie. The famous Dubliner stood tall and confident in suit, glasses, and high hat, his right hand leaning on a cane, as if ready to venture forth to face his critics.

In the evening, after dinner and then theater, I walked the Square again. Warm and welcoming in the moonlight, the three rows of dark red buildings — almost black now — seemed to be resting, their windows half-observed, like closed eyes. I strolled the perimeter several times, and fell in love with this gem, aging very nicely into its third century.

One good book: [Four Dubliners](#)